

STATE OF MICHIGAN

Family  
Independence  
Agency

July 2002

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**Celebrating Foster Care Month:** Showing off the governor's Foster Care Month proclamation are (from left): Barbara Ellington, president of Michigan Foster and Adoptive Parents Association; FIA director Doug Howard; Verlie Ruffin from Michigan Federation of Private Child Placing Agencies; Joyce Duncan, adopted daughter of a parents' association staff member; and Lisa Gigliotti of the Governor's Office.

## May was Foster Care Month

**Government, private agencies and parents rallied at state Capitol  
Family Independence Agency is 2002 national "agency of the year"**

Michigan government, private agency partners and foster families celebrated their service to abused and neglected children in May. State officials, foster parents and children celebrated "Foster Care Month" at a state Capitol Building rally May 7. It was one of many events dedicating May as National Foster Care Month.

During the ceremony, Lisa Gigliotti of Governor John Engler's staff presented the Foster Care Month declaration to FIA director Douglas E. Howard, Verlie Ruffin and Barbara Ellington. Ellington is president of the Michigan Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, and Ruffin is assistant director of Michigan Federation of Private Child Placing Agencies.

The two latter agencies are important partners that represent thousands of foster care providers throughout Michigan. Together, the FIA, associations, foster and adoptive parents care for 20,000 children in Michigan each year.

"Twenty-eight children a day enter Michigan's foster care system," Howard said. "This is a public thank you and encouragement



**Former foster child Pam Little (above) was among speakers at the event. "Twenty eight children a day go into foster care," she said. "Twenty eight! That's a classroom."**

*continues on page 2*

# Foster Care Month

*continues from page 1*

to all the people who have so graciously given their time to help children and strengthen families in Michigan. This is a time to highlight the important contributions foster parents make.”

Former foster children were among speakers at the rally, along with Michigan Supreme Court Justice Stephen Markman, state Rep. John Stewart of Plymouth, James Beougher of the FIA and Sharon Brinks, an attorney who works in areas of liability for foster and adoptive families. Other speakers were Children’s Ombudsman Robert Geake, Pam Little and Joyce Johnson, both former foster children.

During the rally, Michigan Foster and Adoptive Parent Association recognized the National Foster Parent Association’s, “Foster Care Agency of the Year.” The FIA received the 2002 award at the National Foster Parent Conference. Jim Beougher, director of the FIA Child and Family Services Administration, accepted the award for Michigan.

“We have once again become a major player in the child welfare management systems of this state,” said Ellington. “We are poised for greatness in the coming years.”

The state Capitol event was one of many scheduled to celebrate Foster Care Month. The Michigan Foster and Adoptive Parent Association sponsored billboards around the state during May thanking foster parents for their important life-affirming work. Other events scheduled to celebrate Foster Care Month included:

- Wayne County FIA held a foster parent appreciation dinner May 11.
  - Jackson County FIA held a recognition breakfast for foster parents and Lutheran Social Services of Michigan foster parents May 17.
  - Macomb County FIA held a banquet for foster parents May 2.
  - Washtenaw County planned a foster parent appreciation dinner for foster families and placed local advertising thanking foster parents.
  - St. Joseph County FIA hosted a special program April 16 in Centreville.
  - Ontonagon County FIA honored its foster parents at an April 26 event.
- See related story on page 14.



## FIA Icon

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Family Independence Agency

**John Engler**, Governor  
**Douglas E. Howard**, Director  
Family Independence Agency  
**Karen Smith**, Director  
FIA Office of Communications  
**Larry VanDeSande**, Editor  
[VanDeSandeL@michigan.gov](mailto:VanDeSandeL@michigan.gov)  
**Lynn Ettinger**, Online Production

## Editorial Board

**Sue Doby**  
[DobyS@michigan.gov](mailto:DobyS@michigan.gov)  
Department of Information Technology/ITMS

**Anna Gallagher**  
[GallagherA@michigan.gov](mailto:GallagherA@michigan.gov)  
Office of the Director /Deputy Director

**Julie Horn Alexander**  
[HornJ@michigan.gov](mailto:HornJ@michigan.gov)  
Office of Reengineering & Quality Management

**Mary Mehren**  
[MehrenM@michigan.gov](mailto:MehrenM@michigan.gov)  
Child and Family Services Administration

**George Noonan**  
[NoonanG@michigan.gov](mailto:NoonanG@michigan.gov)  
Field Operations Administration

**Anne Sinicropi Sigourney**  
[SigourneyA@michigan.gov](mailto:SigourneyA@michigan.gov)  
Family Independence Services Administration

**Gary Swan**  
[SwanG@michigan.gov](mailto:SwanG@michigan.gov)  
Office of Human Resources

**Patrick Vaughan**  
[VaughanP@michigan.gov](mailto:VaughanP@michigan.gov)  
Administration on Budget, Analysis  
and Financial Management

■ Submit stories online through the editor or  
an appropriate Editorial Board member.

# From the Director

By Douglas E. Howard

Director, Family Independence Agency



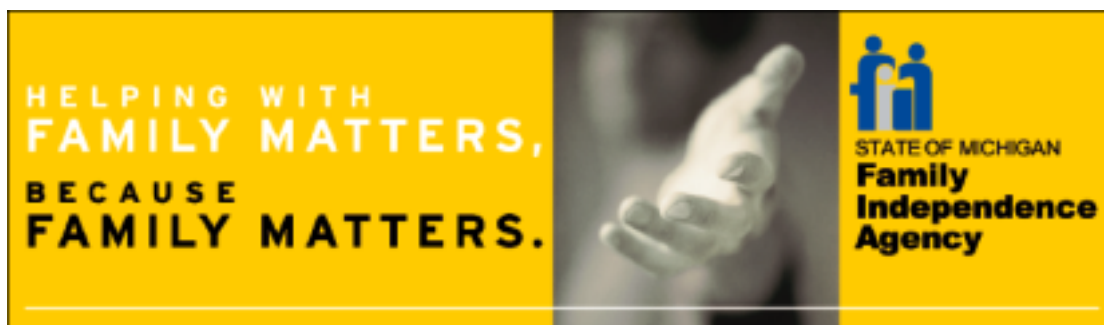
## FIA's outdoor advertising program

The Family Independence Agency began an outdoor advertising campaign in May. The first billboard is pictured below. The campaign will be conducted on billboards around the state for at least one year with an option to renew. The goal is to provide statewide outreach and public education to Michigan citizens on services provided by or through the FIA. Each program area to be featured has a federal or state requirement to perform outreach and provide public education.

How can the FIA take on such a significant project in a down budget year? No new or additional funding is required to carry out this program and no programs or services are sacrificed to enable this program, which is expected to be carried out over 12-19 months with a total estimated financial value exceeding \$1 million. Under that agreement, the cost to appropriate FIA accounts will be \$500,000-\$827,000. Most billboards will qualify for federal matching funds ranging from 50-100 percent of the net cost and the vendor is providing in-kind advertising and support exceeding \$200,000.

The FIA will use 23 billboards located throughout the state. The program includes billboards for foster care, Safe Delivery, child care and development, adoption, energy assistance, child and adult protective services, weatherization and child support. The next billboards will focus on child protective services and child support. Each outdoor message will be previewed by focus groups before placement. The FIA will use informal and formal measures to determine gains from the campaign.

The outdoor advertising campaign continues the FIA initiative to develop a common look for published material that can be carried over to pamphlets, brochures and posters. This was a goal recommended by employee and customer work groups that grew out of the 1998 Rossman Martin report on the FIA's perception in communities and relationship with customers. Please join me in welcoming this campaign to help Michigan citizens better understand our programs and the positive role they play in their lives.





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# Another kind of retirement planning

## Administrative Services launches plans for transition, looks to future FIA unit is responsible for purchasing, facilities, mail & vehicle management

By Patrick M. Vaughan, Purchasing Manager  
FIA Bureau of Administrative Services, Lansing

■ For Additional information about “Teaming For Excellence In Times Of Transition”, contact Julie Horn Alexander at (517) 373-4659 or by email to [hornj@michigan.gov](mailto:hornj@michigan.gov)

Faced with the triple impact of early retirements, budget woes and the certainty of organizational change, FIA’s Bureau of Administrative Services (BAS), like most other major agency units, is pursuing ways to trigger transition planning.

“The interest of the public is on FIA’s ability to continue effective client services,” said James Kasprzak, Bureau of Administrative Services director. “To accomplish that, the BAS team has to be just as prepared, ready and certain that every FIA location has the goods, services and equipment to keep operations running.

“That is our critical mission.”



Asha Shah

Kasprzak’s bureau—part of the FIA Administration on Budget, Analysis & Financial Management under the leadership of Asha Shah—has responsibility for centralized purchasing, telecommunications, vehicle management, office services and facilities management functions. It also handles oversight of procurement cards issued to FIA employees and provides support services to Michigan Disability Determination Service.

“Proper planning is going to be the key to a smooth transition,” Shah said.

Shah and her staff have spent a significant amount of time assessing the impact of early retirement, both within their administration and statewide in the FIA. The potential impact of “early out” retirements on FIA is great, as 2,680 of the FIA’s 13,038 workers—more than 21 percent of the work force—elected to retire early.



Jim Kasprzak

### Teaming for post-retirement

Kasprzak launched the transition planning effort by convening an April 22 session with his management team that featured a “Teaming for Excellence in Times of Transition” workshop presentation by Julie Horn Alexander, deputy director of FIA’s Office of Reengineering and Quality Management. Horn Alexander is a member of the team that designed the change and transition presentation to assist FIA employees.

“All of us recognize there is some apprehension and concern”, Kasprzak said. “I see this as an opportunity to forge a new beginning, take a look at what we really need to be doing now, and work to avoid some of the difficulties FIA encountered during the early out transition in 1997.”

Horn Alexander started the two-hour workshop by stressing the commitment of senior FIA leaders to continue quality customer service, to actively involve FIA employees at all levels in the change and transition process, and to foster and support teamwork when developing and implementing changes. She underscored the importance of honoring the accomplishments and contributions of early retirees and taking the time to learn from their professional experiences and knowledge of FIA procedures and practices.

“Most of us remember the events surrounding the last early out transition,” Horn Alexander said. “We lost knowledge, wisdom and skills. Replacement (workers) were often selected too late to learn from departing retirees. The narrow time frame meant many felt it was an ineffective and insensitive way to end a long career in public service.”

Other difficulties learned from the 1997 experience include lack of sufficient planning time and confusion, frustration and concern that many remaining state employees experienced.

## Learning from the past

To avoid these pitfalls, much of the April presentation focused on the meaning of transition and change. Attendees became familiar with a “transition tool kit” developed by the Teaming For Excellence work group that was designed to help managers and team members work their way through the change and transition process. It includes help with:

- Tips for retirees to help them assist team members taking on new roles.
- Tips for those moving from line to management positions so they can start a smooth transition to their new role.
- Team development in a change environment.
- Tips for successful team implementation.
- Managing stress with success.
- Planning for an effective transition.
- Effective process improvement.

One bureau manager said the presentation emphasized the need for effective teamwork and partnering as FIA moves through the changes ahead. This includes recognition that Customer Service Excellence means serving internal FIA customers so work locations can better serve community customers.

Other comments included a suggestion that FIA follow through on employee recommendations made in the FIA 2001 Malcolm Baldrige Assessment Report.

Members of the Bureau of Administrative Services management team include Don Bos, Donna Dean, Jan DeChelbor, Nancy Fleming, Nancy Graham, John Helrigel, Rita Hotchkin, Chris Mollitor, Patrick Vaughan and Dan Werk. Each individual is expected to conduct a similar transition planning session with team members in their respective units.

Copies of the materials and transition tools used at the April 22 BAS session are available from the FIA Office of Reengineering & Quality Management or at the FIA-Net [Early Retirement](#) icon.

## Early retirement commitment

FIA Executive Management Team established priorities to address retirement issues in FIA:

### Goals

- Continue to maintain quality customer service.
- Involve and help employees at all levels effectively manage change.
- Honor employees who are leaving and learn from their experience and knowledge.
- Provide practical tools and techniques that involve employees in developing forward thinking decisions and actions.
- Foster and support teamwork through changes.
- Act with integrity.

### Operating principles

- Critical success factors and values will be maintained.
- Don't assume business as usual.
- Cost-benefit determinations will be weighed in all decisions.

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# Achiever is positive role model for her kids!

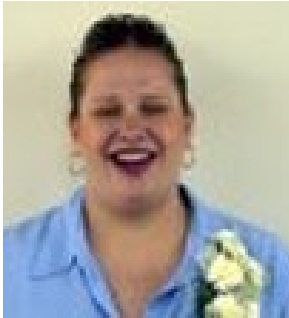
## April 2002 highlights Achiever No. 101, Chastity Merillat of Lenawee County

By Linda Albig, Program Manager

Lenawee County Family Independence Agency, Adrian

Telephone (517) 264-6400

ADRIAN—Chastity Merillat of Adrian is the Family Independence Agency's 101<sup>st</sup> Achiever of the Month. She received the award at an April 26 ceremony at the Lenawee County Human Services Building.



**Chastity Merillat**

Joseph Satterelli, director of Lenawee County FIA, hosted the ceremony, congratulated Chastity, and presented her with a recognition gift certificate. FIA director Douglas E. Howard presented her with an achievement plaque. Also on hand were state Rep. Doug Spade of Adrian, Work First case manager Janice Terrazas and John Haught, director of employment and training for Goodwill Industries, her employer. All commended Chastity for remarkable progress toward economic independence.

Chastity is the single mother of two children—Anastasia, age five, and Ariana, who is eight months of age. She turned to the FIA for assistance in 1996. Through the Lenawee County FIA she received FIP benefits, Medicaid, child day care and Food Assistance, four critical programs that are essential to helping families when their own resources have been temporarily exhausted. Although she was grateful for the support, Chastity was determined not to make public assistance a legacy for her children.

At the time Lenawee County family independence specialist Cindy Brown met Chastity, it was just four days after she had gotten out of a rehabilitation center. Chastity was pregnant, had no job, and was staying in a motel room waiting to get into the women's shelter. Although this was a difficult time for her, she was very pleasant, optimistic and ready to get started on whatever it was going to take to get her life going in the direction that she had planned.

Over the years Chastity has worked in a variety of clerical and accounting positions. While she often maintained steady employment, she was determined to increase her skills and in 1996 enrolled in Jackson Community College to pursue an associate's degree in business (which she is one class from completing).

Her Work First provider, South Central Michigan Works!-Community Action Agency, helped pay for tuition and books. Since she did not have a car, Work First also assisted with the purchase of an automobile, car repairs and funds for work clothing.

In October 2001, Chastity entered Work First training and work program. She was placed at Goodwill Industries, where she provided clerical help at different locations within the organization. Goodwill was so impressed with her work that they hired her permanently as an administrative secretary in January 2002. She still works there today.

Chastity's financial public assistance closed March 26. She continues to receive Food Assistance benefits, child day care and transitional Medicaid, which can last up to one year after FIP assistance is closed.

FIA specialist Cindy Brown recalls: "One of the nice things about working with Chastity is she is always planning ahead. Before I could even bring up what her plans were, she had already prioritized her goals and was working on them.

"She wanted a job, an apartment, and her daughter back home living with her. (Her daughter had been temporarily with her sister.) In less than four weeks, Chastity had accomplished all of the first set of goals she had set for herself. Since that time, Chastity has continued to show that same kind of drive, and has kept her expectations of herself at a high level."

Chastity wants Anastasia and Ariana to believe that with determination and hard work they will be capable of achieving anything. She understands what so many of us also realize, that the best way to help our children believe in themselves is through example.

"I want to be a positive role model for my kids," Chastity said. "That is very important to me!"

Chastity's perseverance, hard work, and determination make her a positive role model for anyone.

# Intercepted letters

**Date:** May 17  
**To:** Linda Wilson, Volunteer Services Coordinator  
Macomb County Family Independence Agency,  
Clinton Township  
**Subj:** Happy retirement!

I would like to wish you a happy and healthy retirement. It is always a pleasure to work with you each year for the Easter Bunny. You should be praised for your devotion and enthusiasm you have put into your position with the agency. Every time I delivered the baskets, you made me feel so good about what I was doing. I couldn't wait till the next year to do it again. It is obvious you genuinely care and appreciate everyone around you. I have and cherish all the thank you letters you have sent me over the years. It was receiving those letters that encouraged my sisters to make baskets with me.

**Rose Scott**  
Richmond

■ The author prefers to call herself a “donor” rather than volunteer. Linda Wilson called her a “long time donor” in Macomb County. Charlotte Ferreri of Macomb County submitted this item.

**Date:** May 9  
**To:** Andy Quigley, Family Independence Specialist  
Gladwin County Family Independence Agency,  
Gladwin  
**Subj:** Thanks

Thank you for caring so much about my family and I, and for the help you've helped get us. You explain things very well and you are very pleasant to have an appointment with. You help make an embarrassing situation, asking for help, a little less hard on us. I wanted you to know how you impacted a few lives. We're thankful for you.

**Dianna & family**

■ The author requested her last name not be used.  
Submitted by Karin Aman.

**Date:** March 29  
**To:** FIA director Doug Howard  
**Subj:** Slipping Through

■ From John Collins of Kent County FIA. “I found it quite moving and applicable to our mission,” he said.

## Slipping Through

Passing by unseen  
Leaving no trail of remembrance  
Existing as a shadowed afterthought  
Using little and taking only what fits into pockets

The eye bends around flesh  
A craned neck to look over  
A vacant stare sees through  
Even the fleeting lines of fingerprints fading fast

To tread past; a silent  
Push through the interwoven fabric of civility  
Becoming cousin to invisibility  
Calling downwind home

Name withheld and no picture taken  
Staining not the glass surface of society  
A knowing glance quite mistaken  
To crawl beneath the skin of notice;  
Living without hello or goodbye

**By Gerald Rice**

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there are more Intercepted letters on pages 8-9.

## more Intercepted letters

**Date:** April 22  
**To:** Roger Quinn, Program manager  
Northern Michigan Adoption Program  
Zone 2 Office, Traverse City  
**Subj:** Gayle Anderson

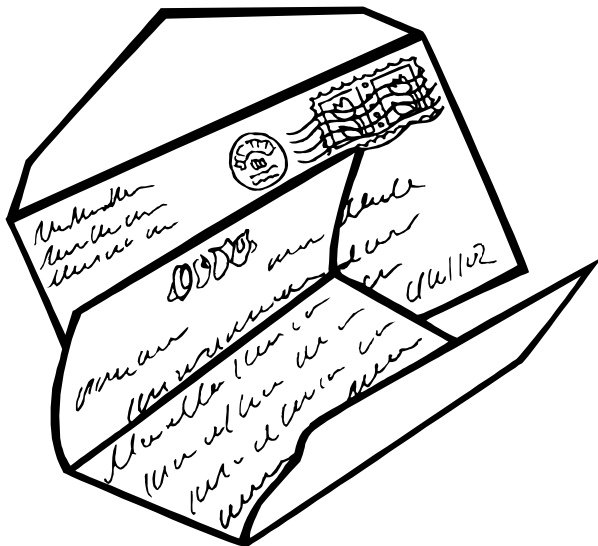
I am writing this letter to inform you of the support and assistance your employee, Gayle Anderson, has provided my family. My husband and I met Gayle last March through an adoptive parent support group she organizes and facilitates. We had recently become foster parents to two girls ages 4 and 3 in a pre-adoptive placement. The reality and challenges of raising these girls was more difficult than we had expected. When I contacted Gayle about the meeting, she immediately welcomed us even though we lived in a different county. We have experienced comfort, reassurance, and compassion at those meetings. Gayle was always present to offer her personal support and advice about the current crisis (and trust me there are many!).

Recently, my family went on our first official family vacation. The vacation did not go as planned and we came back as a family in crisis. My daughters had a difficult time with the change and we were shell shocked with the reoccurrence of some very difficult behavior. It felt like we were back at the beginning and I had no idea of how to start over. I placed calls to various support services and Gayle was one of those contacts. She responded promptly to my needs—frustration, fear, anger, and sadness—and provided multiple suggestions for where to start. I was grateful for her help and quick response. However, it didn't end there. Gayle has followed up with us to provide contacts for non-relative respite that is willing to handle difficult children, assistance with medical subsidy, an adoptive parent contact that has been in a similar situation, and support group information for Reactive Attachment Disorder. Throughout the past year, Gayle has been a resource to us personally and professionally. She is an excellent representative of the Northern Michigan Adoption Program and in my opinion an outstanding person!

**Rebecca Brinks, OTR**

**Occupational therapist, rehabilitation manager and adoptive mom  
Ludington**

■ Roger Quinn adds: "Gayle Anderson is a quietly devoted adoption specialist whose office is located at the Mason County Family Independence Agency. She is very caring, devoted and helpful in her adoption work. This expression of gratitude from a client family is reflecting what I, as her supervisor, have heard from many others and observed myself in the 13 or so years that she has been part of our unit."



**Date:** March 26  
**To:** Gov. Engler  
**Subj:** Grant

On March 14 I was awarded a Michigan 4C Association start-up grant of \$3,500. I understand it is thanks to your willingness to address the quality of child care in our state that these funds are available. As a special education public school teacher for over 16 years, I have seen the long-term effects of inadequate early child care and education. I am very excited to order quality educational toys and supplies to add to my family child care home. My sincere thanks for your concern for child care in our state.

**Coleen Cloward**  
**The Sunshine House**  
**Marshall**

■ The author's grant came through the EQUIP program, funded the FIA and administered by the 4C Association. For more information, see the FIA news release dated March 25 at [www.michigan.gov/fia](http://www.michigan.gov/fia) or call the 4C Association at (800) 950-4171.



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**Date:** April 16  
**To:** Vennetie Poston, Family Independence Manager  
Muskegon County Family Independence Agency, Muskegon  
**Subj:** Yvonne Bialik

I'm writing to you to let you know Yvonne Bialik, your eligibility specialist, is doing an absolutely outstanding job.

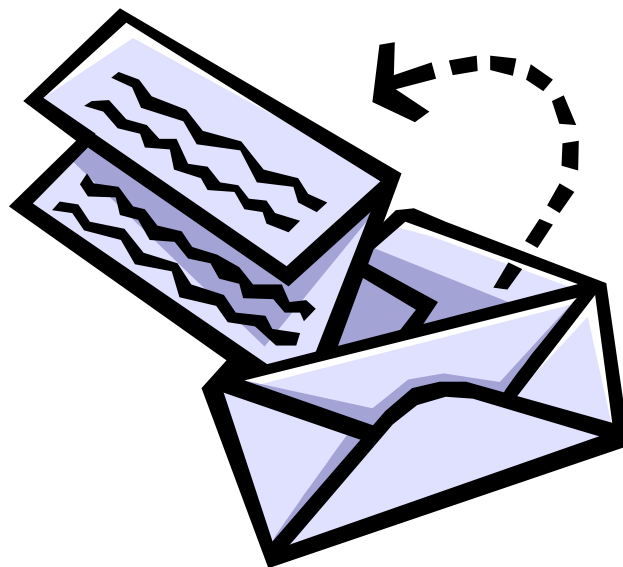
I came to FIA April 9 seeking State Emergency Relief for an electric bill that was years overdue. "You must have fallen through the cracks," was the utility company's explanation why I received this bill long after having had electric service in my name at other residences, with no mention of the existing balance owed.

Ms. Bialik saw me right away and immediately set me at ease with her kind manner and genuine concern. I was impressed by the way she expedited my information and all the necessary paperwork, seemingly effortlessly, and was able to convey her findings to me with easy to understand terms, while maintaining an attitude of compassion. A few days later, when the situation suddenly became bleak, Ms Bialik rapidly resolved the issue, unbelievably, within 30 minutes!

I can say, without qualifications, that my experience was extremely favorable, due to the way Ms. Bialik handled the situation. I commend her for going above and beyond the call of duty, and thank you for providing the people of Muskegon County with the opportunity to be treated humanely and with dignity and respect.

Please extend to Ms. Bialik my compliments and admiration for a job well done.

**Patricia G. Margadona**  
Muskegon



**Date:** April 11  
**To:** Patrick Cannon, Director  
Michigan Commission for the Blind, Lansing  
**Subj:** Debbie Wilson

Hello, my name is Francia Malone. I don't know if you remember me. I was a client of the Michigan Commission for the Blind – Flint Region. In December, I received an award there for the "Rehabilitant of the Year."

I guess the recent death of my mother compelled me to let others know how much you appreciate them. I am so grateful for the commission for helping. It's counselors like Ms. Wilson who give you hope. I wrote to Mr. Buscetta, also, to express my appreciation.

If the commission had a "counselor of the year" award, I feel that Ms. Wilson should receive the honor. I can't say enough about Ms. Wilson and her dedication to her career and clients. I was hopeless most of my life, because of eye doctors telling me there is nothing that could be done. Because Ms. Wilson has albinism she was able to help me research my own suspicions. She knew how I felt growing up in a society that treats you differently. We shared a lot of the same experiences in life.

As a result, I was properly diagnosed at age 28 with a form of albinism that primarily affects the eyes only. My mother finally had peace of mind before she passed on a few weeks ago. Albinism was a part of my mom and I will continue to educate others regarding albinism and many doors have opened for me. I can not forget all the hard work that Ms. Wilson did for me. Please let me know if I can help the commission in any way.

**Francia Malone**  
Flint

■ Debbie Wilson is a rehabilitation counselor for Michigan Commission for the Blind in Flint. "Mr. Buscetta" is Jim Buscetta, an MCB administrator in Lansing.

# Michigan State Disbursement Unit

**Two-year-old unit collects and disburses child support payments  
Employers submit withheld income to one site, not 83 county offices  
More than 99 percent of payments are sent timely to Friends of Court**

By Walt Niewiadomski

Michigan State Disbursement Unit, Lansing

Telephone (517) 334-8646

Since mid-2000 Michigan employers have been able to submit employee income withheld for child support to a single entity, not 83 county Friend of the Court offices.

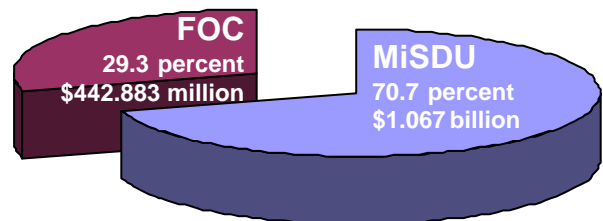
The Michigan State Disbursement Unit—also known as MiSDU or SDU—was established in 2000 in response to the federal welfare reform act of 1996. Some of the specific requirements were that:

- Employers must be given one location where income withholding is sent.
- The state IV-D agency (FIA) establishes and operates an SDU to collect and disburse child support payments.
- The state agency or a contractor responsible directly to the state agency must operate the SDU. The FIA selected Affiliated Computer Services Inc. (formerly known as Lockheed Martin IMS) to construct and operate the MiSDU.
- The SDU must disburse all amounts payable within two business days after receipt from the employer or other source if sufficient information identifying the payee is provided.

Previously each county Friend of the Court office collected child and spousal support for customers in its jurisdiction.

Establishment of the MiSDU and transfer of the receipting functions from the counties to the MiSDU was a collaborative effort of Friends of the Court, employers and state government. It commenced with an invitation to bid and is currently a functional state disbursement unit processing over \$90 million monthly.

## Michigan Child Support Payments Fiscal Year 2001 Total Payments: \$1.51 billion



### Current status

The MiSDU is part of a linked system connected electronically with county Friend of the Court (FOC) systems. Where the MiSDU receipts employer payments from child and spousal support income withholding, the FOCs continue to receipt payments directly from absent parents and disburse them to custodial parents.

Employer payment receipting has grown rapidly since summer 2000. This is due to active participation of Friend of the Court offices in deployment of the MiSDU. Also, employers have recognized the efficiency of submitting all Michigan child support withholding payments to a single site and are well served by timely and efficient fund disbursement.

Nearly \$90 million is being receipted from employers and disbursed to custodial parents monthly. Of this amount, almost 97 percent is validated by the MiSDU and transmitted to FOCs as payments. Employers do not completely or accurately identify about 2 percent of payments, but adequate information is available to transmit those to the appropriate FOC within 24 hours of receipt.

As a result, more than 99 percent of payments are available to FOCs within 24 hours for disbursement to custodial parents. The remaining payments have information flaws that must be resolved through contact with the employer. They are resolved in 4-10 days depending on availability of the employer's payroll staff.

To further improve the quality of employer provided information, there have been mailings over the course of the past year to provide employers with correct identifiers so they can update payroll files.

### Critical technology

Technology has been a decisive factor in assuring the payments are processed efficiently. More than 15 percent of employer payments are being submitted electronically. Most are submitted through the national banking system which allows transfer of monies and information for timely, accurate and efficient posting of transactions. In addition, an Internet web site has been established to allow employers to authorize transfers from their payroll accounts.

The MiSDU uses high volume processing and imaging technology which not only assures timely payment but also retrieval of any payment document electronically in the event there is ever a question about a payment.

In an attempt to emulate some of the successes of the private sector, it was recognized that the MiSDU needed to be responsive to its customers—Friend of the Court offices, employers, non-custodial and custodial parents. A critical factor is communications. Through the use of employer workgroups, weekly conference calls with FOCs and regional conferences for employers and FOCs, it became obvious

***Nearly \$90 million is receipted from employers and disbursed to custodial parents monthly, almost 97 percent is validated by the State Disbursement Unit and transmitted to Friend of the Court offices as payments. More than 99 percent are available for disbursement to custodial parents within 24 hours.***

that there was need for toll-free, single points of contact where stakeholders can get accurate and timely information on transaction and processing requirements.

Assistance lines were established for employers (800-817-0805) and FOCs (800-817-0632). Customer telephone calls are answered in 10-20 seconds, completed in 3 to 4 minutes, entered to a tracking system for use in evaluating the quality of MiSDU services, and brought to closure through a call-back to the customer to assure the resolution of the problem was satisfactory.

### Future opportunities

The MiSDU receipts approximately 70 percent of Michigan child support payments. Friend of the Court offices collect another 30 percent related to absent parent direct payments and disburse these funds to custodial parents.

We are working to consolidate these functions within the MiSDU. Over the next year, a systematic deployment of the MiSDU will result in:

- Central receipt of all payments from non-custodial parents.
- Disbursement to custodial parents within two business days.
- Activation of customer services for both non-custodial and custodial parents.
- Issuance of payment coupons for employers and non-custodial parents.
- Outreach and deployment of electronic means of payment by employers and non-custodial parents to the MiSDU followed by electronic disbursement to non-custodial parents.

The MiSDU is also working with other states to accomplish the electronic transmission of interstate payments—those cases that originated in Michigan but have had collection responsibility transferred to another state. Generally this has occurred where the non-custodial parent has moved to a job in the other state and the custodial parent is in Michigan.

As technology and new business models present the opportunity to improve child support services, Michigan will continue to focus improvements in the Michigan State Disbursement Unit and its relationship to Friend of the Courts offices, employers, payers and parents around Michigan.

## Van Buren County

# Local education efforts improve customer service

## County FIA & universities acknowledge achievement during ceremony

By Vicki Clark, Services Program Manager  
Van Buren County Family Independence Agency  
Telephone (616) 621-2857

HARTFORD—Van Buren County celebrated their education initiatives April 24 with a reception and recognition event. The event acknowledged educational achievement and partnership between Van Buren FIA staff and state universities and colleges.

An unexpected power outage at the onset of the event and subsequent candlelight celebration took on special significance since the quote of the day was, "Social workers are like those candles, lighting the way to assist those who may be lost in the dark and need direction." We lit our share and the festivities commenced.

The highlight of the event was celebration of graduation from Grand Valley State University's master of social work program by six Van Buren FIA staff, one from Cass County FIA and one from Kalamazoo FIA. This concluded three-and-a-half years of classes held at Van Buren FIA in partnership with the GVSU School of Social Work.

"Who would have thought we would have such interest, participation and support in these programs?" said Van Buren FIA director Marc Del Mariani. "There has been wonderful involvement that demonstrates not only the commitment of those who have participated but everyone else who helped to make these efforts available and successful."

Del Mariani said adding to the partial tuition program incentives of 60 and 90 percent (for children's services committed staff) and two hours a week of administrative leave, the convenience of having the classes and field placements in the office added to the staff appeal. He said many of the final projects required in conjunction with the field placement were beneficial in studying programs, issues and policies of importance to the local office.

A special presentation was made to Kathy Miller, Van Buren FIA foster care supervisor, honoring her as MSW "Student of the Year" at Grand Valley. The presentation was made jointly by Dave Gabrielse of GVSU (a retired Kent County FIA section manager) and Del Mariani.

Also recognized were 15 students who began the second MSW cohort this year. Nine are members of Van Buren staff and the remaining six from area agencies and other FIA offices.



**The Graduates:** Upper photo captures graduating MSW class with partnership banner. Left to right: Julie Beckett, Clare Olney, Kerrie George, Anna Ketchum (kneeling), Kathy Miller, Russell Bell (Kalamazoo FIA), Mary Suseland (Cass FIA) and Theresa Root.

**Below:** Van Buren County FIA director Marc Del Mariani and Rodney Mulder, dean of the School of Social Work, display the partnership banner.



*continues next page*



# FIA-university collaboration

*continues from page 12*

Further recognition went to the eight staff members who recently began an in-house bachelor's degree program through Spring Arbor University. Another 39 staff members were recognized who completed Spanish classes conducted in our office during the past year by staff from Southwestern Michigan College.

Spanish fluency is important because Van Buren County has one of the largest migrant services programs in the state and has a growing Hispanic population. Del Mariani said Spanish instruction was also useful for learning more about Hispanic customs and culture to better understand and serve our customers.

Guests for the event included Rodney Mulder, dean of the GVSU School of Social Work; GVSU field placement director, Dave Lehker; and GVSU Profs. Dave Gabrielse, Myrna McNitt, Jean McFadden, and Lois Owens. Admissions specialist Barbara Slates represented Spring Arbor University.

In presenting the county with a GVSU-Van Buren FIA partnership banner, Dean Mulder congratulated the county on all their educational initiatives and their commitment to continuing education through the MSW program.

"This has been a true team effort," Del Mariani said. "We could not have initiated these programs without knowing that staff would work together. We have truly joined together in partnership."

## 2002 FIA golf challenge

### Arrangements made, teams limited to 36 for second year event

By Henry Roukema

Kent County Family Independence Agency

■ Information: Chuck Audy: [Audyc@michigan.gov](mailto:Audyc@michigan.gov) or call (616) 247-6089

GRAND RAPIDS—Arrangements have been completed for the 2002 FIA All Counties Golf Challenge. The event will take place Aug. 19 at Boulder Creek Golf Club in Grand Rapids.

The format will be a four-man scramble with a shotgun tee-off at 8 AM. Lunch will follow the event with a presentation of the winner's trophy. The cost is \$55 per person, \$220 a foursome. Entry forms can be obtained from Chuck Audy at [Audyc@michigan.gov](mailto:Audyc@michigan.gov) or telephone (616) 247-6089.

It should be mentioned that Boulder Creek is upscale course and has a dress code. Denim is not allowed and shirts must have collars.

We have negotiated a lodging rate at the Lexington Suite, located at 5401 28th Court SE, just off the I-96 East 28th Street exit. The hotel is located next to the Kent County FIA Services Unit building and the Office of Professional Development Training Center.

Your view is not great but they are offering a room rate of \$62 and that includes breakfast. They also offer a hospitality room should some wish to do some socializing. Since networking is one of the goals of this event, that might not be a bad idea.

The hotel is about 13 miles from the course. We had hoped to find something closer but there simply are not any good hotels nearby. We will provide a little map from the hotel to the course. It should be about a 20-minute drive.

For those who are interested, we have negotiated a special rate for golf on Sunday afternoon after 2 PM. If you identify yourself as being part of the next day's FIA outing, 18 holes and a cart will cost \$35, a price well below their normal cost.

In discussion with the course, we have decided to limit the number of entries to 36, or two per hole in the shotgun format. This is down from our earlier article, where we said we would do 40.

We have received inquiries from numerous counties around the state and have decided that we can only accept an entry when the form has been received and a check accompanies it. At the time of this writing, which is early May, we have received 15 completed entries. We have a bank account established and expect the rest to fill up quite quickly. If you have not sent your money yet, please check with Chuck Audy to make sure that entry slots are still available.

To restate, participants must be FIA employees or retirees. A county can send more than one team. Small counties may blend their teams with other counties. We look forward to seeing you and we expect a fun event.

# Recognition night at Lake Gogebic

## Ontonagon County recognizes foster parents for outstanding service

By Janet M. Holmstrom, Program Manager

Ontonagon County Family Independence Agency, Ontonagon

Telephone (906) 884-4951 Ext. 151

BERGLAND—Ontonagon County foster parents past and present were honored at a special event April 26. The beautiful Root Cellar restaurant, located on U.S. 28 and Lake Gogebic near Bergland, was the setting for an evening of food and fun. In addition to the foster parents, friends, family, and many professionals involved in foster care also came to show their support and appreciation of our foster parents.

For the occasion, the Root Cellar was decorated with a children's theme in celebration of the children foster parents serve. County officials Dale MacDonald, director of Ontonagon-Gogebic FIA, juvenile officer Paula Domitrovich, and Probate-Juvenile Court Judge Joseph Zeleznik all recognized foster parents. State Rep. Rich Brown from Bessemer was unable to attend and sent his best wishes.

During dessert, foster home licensing specialist Bobbi Niemi and I gave out "fun" awards to the: foster home with least placements (a "starter" placement beanie doll); longest retired foster parents (due to budget cuts, they got toy gold watches); foster parent who has branched out and now adopts fish. We gave them a toy for the other fish to play with.

After the fun, special recognition certificates were given to all foster parents in attendance. Two long-time foster homes were given plaques in appreciation of their many years of service to children. U.S. Rep. Bart Stupak from Menominee also sent letters of appreciation. Special awards included those given to:

- Dorothy and the late Taavo Kumma, who were recognized for 13 years of service. The Kummas have a shelter home in Marenisco that is supervised by Ontonagon FIA. They have been invaluable in taking in children at all hours of the night.

- Ed and Sue Hokans of Ontonagon were recognized for 18 years of service. The Hokans have provided a warm home for many children and adopted several of them over the years. Ed and Sue have recently retired and will be missed by Ontonagon County child welfare professionals.

- If you live near here and would like to be a foster parent, contact Bobbi Niemi at (906) 884-4951 Ext. 118. She will answer your questions and help introduce you to a wonderful world where children need you every day.



**Above:** Dorothy Kumma with Dale MacDonald and Bobbi Niemi of Ontonagon FIA.



**Left:** Sue and Ed Hokans.

**Below:** An elk that resides with the herd at the Root Cellar restaurant, where foster parents received their awards.

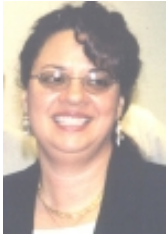


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## FIA people

**Barbara Hoffman Belcher** of Big Rapids, a former director of the FIA offices in Mecosta and Ontonagon counties, died March 23 in Marion. She was 79.

**Sherry Thomas-Cloud**, director of Kalamazoo County FIA, was in March named one of eight inaugural members to the Western Michigan University School of Social Work's Outstanding Alumni Academy. She was honored for "significant contributions to the field of social work and outstanding leadership."



**Connie Dykman**, director of Branch-Hillsdale FIA, was in May named one of four inaugural members to the WMU Outstanding Alumni Academy of Public Administration Graduates. Dykman earned a doctorate in public administration degree in 1989.

**Thomas-Cloud**

**Pamela Dukes**, a foster care specialist with Berrien County FIA in Benton Harbor, was the subject of a two-page story May 7 in The Herald-Palladium, a daily newspaper in St. Joseph. Dukes was featured in "Career Pathway—Climbing the Career Ladder", a feature on career opportunities in the region. "Working in this field has many rewards," Dukes said. "It provides an opportunity to introduce families to resources than can help strengthen the family unit. It allows children to be placed into loving homes... It reunites families and provides them with techniques to address issues that have had a negative effect on their lives." Dukes discussed her eight-week training course with the FIA's Child Welfare Institute. "The skills learned are constantly enhanced," she said. "Supervisors and coworkers are also an excellent source of training."

A follow-up to "Cinderella completes her degree", a story published in the September-October 2000 FIA Icon: **Phyllis Edwards**, a family independence manager at the Highland Park District in Wayne County, was a child welfare grant recipient at Marygrove College in 1996. She received a master's in social work degree from Wayne State University in May 2002 and has been accepted to University of Michigan to begin doctoral work. Phyllis was elected to the National Association of Social Workers-Michigan chapter regional board of directors and to the national board of directors as a member at large. Phyllis currently co-chairs the 26th NASW annual state conference. She recently started the Madison Community Resource Center, a non-profit organization whose goal is to enrich and empower neighborhoods in Detroit.

■ Thanks to **Marvel Sims-McCall** of Wayne County FIA for the update.

**Gene Hashley**, the former Wayne County FIA director of communications, an ad hoc member of the FIA Icon editorial board and a regular contributor to this publication for the past five years, retired from state service July 1. A past communications employee with Michigan Department of Labor and the Michigan House of Representatives, Gene is pursuing a second career in library science.



**Hashley**

In a photo caption in the May-June issue, **Trish McHugh**'s name was misspelled. Trish is a family independence manager in Mecosta County. FIA Icon apologizes for the error.

**Patrick Vaughan**, a member of the FIA Icon editorial board, retired from state service July 1. Vaughan, the former director of FIA Purchasing, was a contributor to FIA Icon and DSS Digest, its predecessor publication, as representative of the Medical Services Administration. His goals include a move to Las Vegas. "Always wanted to work with Las Vegas Sun," he said. "With luck, I will."



# Making the world a little smaller

## Alpena County provides computer for customer use

### Includes link to Internet and popular software program access

By Cheri McGlone, Project Zero Coordinator

Alpena-Presque Isle County Family Independence Agency

ALPENa—Alpena County FIA just made access to the rest of the world easier for its customers.

With assistance from a local vendor and FIA staff, the county office recently installed a freestanding computer in the lobby for customers, who can use it for digital access to the Internet and programs such as Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint.



Robyn Karr adds “Favorites” to Alpena County’s lobby PC.

“I’m excited about the opportunity for us to make Internet access available to our customers,” said Alpena County FIA director Bob Roberge. Charter Communications is providing digital Internet access to the county office at a reduced rate, and they provided free basic cable television for Alpena FIA.

Robyn Karr, information technologist for Alpena County FIA, was instrumental in setting up the computer with the assistance from FIA Central Office staff. Bill Daugherty, a family independence manager in Alpena County, made the necessary arrangements with Charter Communications to install and provide the high-speed Internet service.

A list of “Favorites” is available for customers to easily access web sites that may interest them. Some of these sites include the Family Independence Agency, Michigan Works!, [michigan.gov](http://michigan.gov), Department of Civil Service and the Michigan Talent Bank. Alpena County FIA anticipate this will be a valuable tool for our customers, whether it is used to find rental information, employment, or to post a resume.

For more information on this project, please call Robyn Karr at (989) 354-7233.

## FIA presents first juvenile justice awards

### Three agencies rewarded for demonstrating “balanced and restorative justice”

HARBOR SPRINGS — FIA deputy director Mark Jasonowicz awarded the agency’s first “Excellence in Balanced and Restorative Justice” awards to three Michigan counties May 2. The awards recognize best practices in that method of dealing with juvenile crime.

The counties were selected from among 24 applicants to receive the awards at the fourth BARJ conference. Agencies receiving awards were:

- The UPCAP Resolution Services Program in Escanaba works cooperatively with law enforcement, courts, schools and other organizations such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving. UPCAP runs a victim/offender mediation program, conducts drunk driving impact panels, trains peer mediators at a local middle school and teaches peacemaking skills to first and third graders.

- The Kalamazoo Balanced and Restorative Justice Network is an association of more than 50 local agencies including government, non-profit groups, the faith communities and schools. Assistant prosecuting attorneys are physically located in targeted neighborhoods to work on crime prevention with public safety officers, members of the family court and a curfew-truancy reduction facility called CLOCK – the Center for Leadership Options for Community Kids.

- The Muskegon County Juvenile Division of the Family Court and Child and Family Services work closely with Muskegon public schools, Westshore Dispute Resolution Center and Habitat for Humanity on restorative justice initiatives. Offenders of low-impact crimes are sent to the resolution center and then are referred to Habitat for Humanity. They learn rudimentary carpentry skills and earn money that is used to pay restitution to victims. In addition, Steele Middle School operates a resolution room that uses restorative justice principles to reduce student fights and resolve conflicts peacefully.



Jasonowicz



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# Take your daughters to work day

## Kent County staff celebrated annual event in March

### Day included agency work and tough decisions faced by customers

By Sharon Gardei, Family Independence Manager  
Kent County Family Independence Agency, Grand Rapids  
Telephone (616) 247-6265

GRAND RAPIDS—Kent County Family Independence Agency continued a popular tradition March 25 when it hosted “Take Your Daughters to Work Day” at our Franklin Street office. Kent County has been participating in this since it began many years ago.

After Kent County deputy director John Cole and Nancy Stowers (a program manager in payments) welcomed the girls, the organizing committee members took them on a tour of the building. For the past three years our agency has put on a program for the girls in the morning and allowed daughters to sit with their parents during the afternoon. For the first time this year we tried a “welfare simulation” as part of the morning program.

What an interesting morning we had! In the past I’ve presented a simulation at a couple schools for 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> graders. This year for the daughters day I expanded the simulation.



#### Welfare simulation

Our first stop was in the first floor conference room, where the girls witnessed a “real life” interview where the “specialist” was Monica Smiley and the “client” was Erica Sieting (they are both family independence specialists for Kent County.) The interview was set up to closely resemble an actual intake interview. Erica, our client, even started to get choked up during the interview to make it more realistic.

The other stops on the tour were the front desk, mailroom, personnel, computer room, FIP support and the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of our office building.

After the tour we took the girls back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor conference room and they learned a little bit about how budgets are done and how benefits are awarded.

First, the daughters were divided into families of four. Monica then handed each “family” a packet with fake money totaling the amount of a FIP grant for four and a Food Assistance EBT card with the amount of benefits for a family of four with FIP income.

Each family was given sheets with 10 choices they could spend their money on. The sheets included choices like rent, heat, lights, phone, cable, a field trip at school, dinner at McDonald’s, boots for the children, laundry and personal hygiene items. They also had to decide whether they were going to use their Food Assistance only for food—it would get them 27 days worth of food—or whether they would add \$36 to the EBT Food Assistance account and get food for the whole month.

#### Decision-making

It was very interesting to watch the groups make decisions on what to purchase. They all paid rent, heat and electric but the other choices varied from group to group. What they all agreed on is that it is nearly impossible to live on a FIP grant and have everything that a family needs to survive.

After the simulation we had speakers who talked about the food pantries and our Food Assistance outreach, Child Protective and Prevention services, and Work First.

An employee committee did a great job making this happen and working with the girls during the simulation. Besides myself the committee was comprised of: Diane Szymas from personnel, Janice Alberda, Michele Stankus and Elsie Colbert (all family independence specialists); Madeline Casillas from administrative support; Raquel Bossard, an information technician; and Carol Jensen, our Administrative Support Division manager.

I’m glad I was able to be part of this year’s “Take Your Daughters to Work Day.” It was a great experience for everyone involved.

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# Michigan's welfare caseload decreased in April

The Family Independence Program bucked a recent trend in April when it declined 1.7 percent. It was the first decline in the average monthly caseload since September 2001.

FIA director Douglas E. Howard said May 14 the April FIP caseload was 76,115. The March caseload was 77,470. "This decrease is good news in light of current economic conditions," he said. "The caseload has declined by 65.4 percent since the record high of 226,863 in March of 1994."

Gov. John Engler said the caseload has declined for 80 of the 97 months since March of 1994.

"Between October 1992 and April 2002, almost 315,000 cases were closed due to earnings," Engler said. "That means our welfare reform efforts are succeeding in helping families move from welfare to work."

Of the 76,115 FIP cases in April, about 21,500 families (or about 28 percent) were required to participate in Work First and expected to work. Of the balance, about 23,000 were relatives raising children, about 23,000 had a temporary condition that excluded them from the employment requirements, as did 10,000 who had been on public assistance less than 60 days.

## Other work supports during month

April data showed the FIA provided child day care support for 118,725 children. The total Food Assistance Program caseload was 332,884 households representing 760,871 individuals. Since December 2000, this has increased by 77,961 households or 30.5 percent. Food Assistance was formerly known as Food Stamps.

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For information about FIA programs, or to read FIA Icon online, go to: [www.michigan.gov/fia](http://www.michigan.gov/fia)

Family Independence Agency  
Office of Communications  
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